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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement submitted by Zonta International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.

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Statement

1. Zonta International is a worldwide organization of professional executives committed to improving the legal, political, economic, educational, health and professional status of women and girls through service and advocacy. Zonta International has as one of its organizational priorities the promotion of justice and universal respect for fundamental freedoms.

2. Zonta International funds projects that benefit and empower women and girls. Zonta members have provided more than $9.8 million to projects benefiting 2 million women in 14 countries, partnering with United Nations agencies and other aid groups.

3. The 33,000 Zonta members in 1,200 Zonta clubs in 67 countries carry out service projects and advocacy initiatives in their local communities that advance the status of women and girls.

4. Zonta International's United Nations representatives in New York, Geneva, Paris and Vienna participate actively and partner with like-minded organizations in activities that promote meaningful commitments and actions for women's rights and participation.

5. Zonta International viewed the founding of the United Nations as an opportunity to further on the international level its own goals for the advancement of women, women's rights and gender equality. At its international convention in 1946, Zonta International pledged support for the United Nations.

6. Former President of Zonta International and the first woman Assistant Secretary-General, Helvi Sipilä, was instrumental in the United Nations decisions to proclaim 1975 as International Women's Year and to hold the first World Conference on Women, which she chaired. Zonta members have participated in each of the four world conferences on women.

7. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, with its 12 critical areas of concern accompanied by strategic objectives and related actions to be taken by Governments, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders at the national and international levels, has been a road map for framing Zonta International's programmes and advocacy.

8. Zonta's international service projects since Beijing reflect this commitment and include the following:

- Girls' education in South Africa (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF))
- Prevention of female genital mutilation in Burkina Faso (UNICEF)
- Reinventing India: preventing violence against women and girls (United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM))
- Eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus in Nepal (UNICEF)
- Improving women's lives in Afghanistan (Afghan Institute of Learning)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina anti-trafficking community mobilization (STAR Network)
- Microcredit and health education for HIV/AIDS-affected women in the Niger (CARE)

- Education and leadership for girls and young women in the Plurinational State of Bolivia (CARE)
- Revival of rural community-based self-help initiatives in Sri Lanka (United Nations Industrial Development Organization)
- Reduction in the prevalence of obstetric fistula in Liberia (United Nations Population Fund)
- Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Rwanda (UNICEF)
- Safe cities for women in Guatemala and El Salvador (UNIFEM)

9. Zonta International is the largest non-governmental organization donor to UNIFEM and a contributor to the UNIFEM-administered United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. Violence against women is a particular focus of Zonta International's efforts. Contributions to the Trust Fund and some service projects come from a special fund, Zonta International Strategies to Eradicate Violence against Women and Children.

10. Other Zonta International programmes address capacity-building for implementing the Platform for Action: the Amelia Earhart Fellowships for women pursuing a PhD in aerospace-related sciences or engineering; the Jane M. Klausman Women in Business scholarships for junior- and senior-level undergraduates seeking a business career; and the Young Women in Public Affairs Awards for 16- to 20-year-olds who have shown leadership in volunteer activities and are dedicated to the advancement of women.

11. The Zonta International United Nations Committee and Legislative Awareness and Advocacy Committee have encouraged all members to familiarize themselves with and use the Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Millennium Development Goals as the key components of their local, national and international efforts to advance the status of women and promote women's rights and gender equality.

12. Zonta has asked its members in each country to participate in each of the following ways in the Convention process: (a) to obtain and read their country's latest report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, focusing in particular on the concluding recommendations of the Committee; (b) to use the concluding recommendations as a basis for initiating advocacy to address the issues cited by the Committee as being of particular concern for women and girls in their country; (c) to take the initiative or partner with other organizations in researching and presenting information on impediments to the advancement of women at the country level when their country reports to the Committee; and (d) to advocate for universal ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol.

13. Zonta International is endeavouring to highlight to its membership the synergies between the comprehensive framework for women's empowerment and gender equality contained in the Platform for Action, the Convention and other commitments made by countries and the opportunities presented by the less gender-specific but widely embraced Millennium Development Goals. The Zonta International Legislative Awareness and Advocacy Committee Chairman prepared a chart for the use of Zonta members that shows which goals of Zonta International, which of the critical areas of concern from the Platform for Action and which

Millennium Development Goals each of the current international service projects is addressing.

14. Zonta International shares the concern voiced by many women's rights advocates that, although the Millennium Declaration refers to ensuring equal rights for men and women and highlights the importance of the Convention, only two of the Millennium Development Goals are gender-specific and the targets and benchmarks are not adequate measures of progress towards the achievement of the goal. For example, progress on Millennium Development Goal 3, "Promote gender equality and empower women", should not only be measured in terms of the ratio of girls to boys in school, but also include the completion rates at all levels for girls. In terms of employment, it is laudable that the 2005 Millennium Summit added the target of full and productive employment and decent work, but the gender gaps in earnings and sex-disaggregated data for unemployment rates are needed to measure real gender equality progress. The reality is that nearly two thirds of employed women in the developing world are own-account or unpaid family workers.

15. It is of deep concern that Millennium Development Goal 5, "Improve maternal health", is the furthest from the goal of achievement by the target date. More than 500,000 women die each year in childbirth alone. Two of Zonta International's projects during the current biennium, reducing the prevalence of obstetric fistula in Liberia and preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Rwanda, address this important concern. Member States are to be commended for adding the additional Millennium Development Goal target of universal access to reproductive health to Goal 5, but more resources and greater leadership urgently need to be directed towards actualizing the goal of reducing by three quarters the maternal mortality rate in the period from 1990 to 2015.

16. One of the greatest impediments to the achievement of gender equality, women's empowerment and the Millennium Development Goals is, without question, the pandemic of violence against women throughout the world. Violence against women is often referred to, appropriately, as the "missing Millennium Development Goal". Government officials, opinion-makers, civil society organizations, religious figures, men and women and girls and boys must all work to instil gender equality as a way of life in all aspects of life. Lessons learned from the processes of Beijing and the Convention, which emphasize the necessity of systematically mainstreaming gender across all policy and programme initiatives rather than taking isolated actions, are essential in addressing violence against women, as well as to the fulfilment of all of the Millennium Development Goals.

17. It is widely and appropriately acknowledged that women are the key to achieving all the Millennium Development Goals. Women in their multiple roles in family and community must be empowered through education, good health for all the family and opportunities to participate and have a voice. They must be the recipients of the actions needed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. At the same time, women must be the agents of change who, through such empowerment, will insist on sustainable, human development.

18. In order to accomplish the Millennium Development Goal commitment to achieving gender equality and empowering women, adequate and targeted resources must be deployed. The World Bank has reported that over 90 per cent of expenditures aimed at advancing gender equality have been aimed at so-called "sectoral" initiatives in such areas as agriculture, education and health care, not

"direct" gender-equality-promoting activities. By using the lens of the Platform for Action and other commitments and focusing on building the capacity of women's machineries and women's organizations and eliminating obstacles to equal access for women and girls by eliminating school fees or user fees, we might better accomplish Millennium Development Goal 3.

19. Zonta International joins with the many advocates for women's rights in applauding the unanimous resolution of the General Assembly to consolidate the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women into a composite entity headed by an Under-Secretary-General. We believe that this step will further the United Nations capacity for more effective and coherent development at the national level and will have a positive impact on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We trust that the new entity will have the resources and authority to greatly advance gender equality and women's empowerment for women worldwide.